

The Hartford News

January 7 – 13, 2021



“Rat” Control?

One year after filing, an HPD officer’s lawsuit seeking information from a city blogger is back in court. Is freedom of speech at stake?

BY ANNE GOSHDIGIAN

From Kevin Brookman’s wethepeoplehartford.blogspot.com post of December 12th, 2020: “According to sources (Medina refers to them as rats) Medina held a meeting with HPD Supervisors on Friday. Instead of using the meeting as an opportunity to reinforce the culture change with the Supervisors, Medina instead went into a tirade, pacing in front of the room vowing that he will “go after the rats” and the “rats will be fired”.”

His post was in reference to the HPD “Dead Pool” scandal that first broke on his blog on December 4th and was quickly picked up by local—and national—media. Brookman had received the information by a phone call two days earlier from an HPD insider. Nothing new there. During the past 12 years he’s received hundreds of such phone calls that he double-verifies before making them public, as well as anonymous posts on his blog, and often internal HPD documentation. Much of what he posts is information that the leadership at the Hartford Police Department would rather keep from the public.

A lawsuit has been brought against Brookman by Lieutenant Vincent Benvenuto, Commander of HPD’s Narcotics and Vice unit, a position the former patrol officer (as well as former police union steward) received as a promotion from HPD Chief Jason Thody. In part due to the pandemic and how it has impacted the judicial system by slowing down the progress of lawsuits and trials, the case has just recently become active again. Brookman, a defendant in the case, is represented by attorney and former Judge of Probate Robert Killian, who has provided the Hartford News with his “Memorandum of Law in Support of Defendant’s Motions to Strike”, excerpts from which are presented below.

The remainder of this article are Attorney Killian’s words, which are included in the motion he presented to the judge in this case, and are a matter of public record.

(Robert Killian) Defendant Kevin Brookman has been publishing “We the People Hartford” for more than twelve years. He utilizes an electronic format purchased from Google called Google Blogger. The software and files are maintained in Google, Inc’s massive storage capacity where it has its own address: <https://wethepeoplehartford.blogspot.com>. This is separate and distinct from Brookman’s email address.

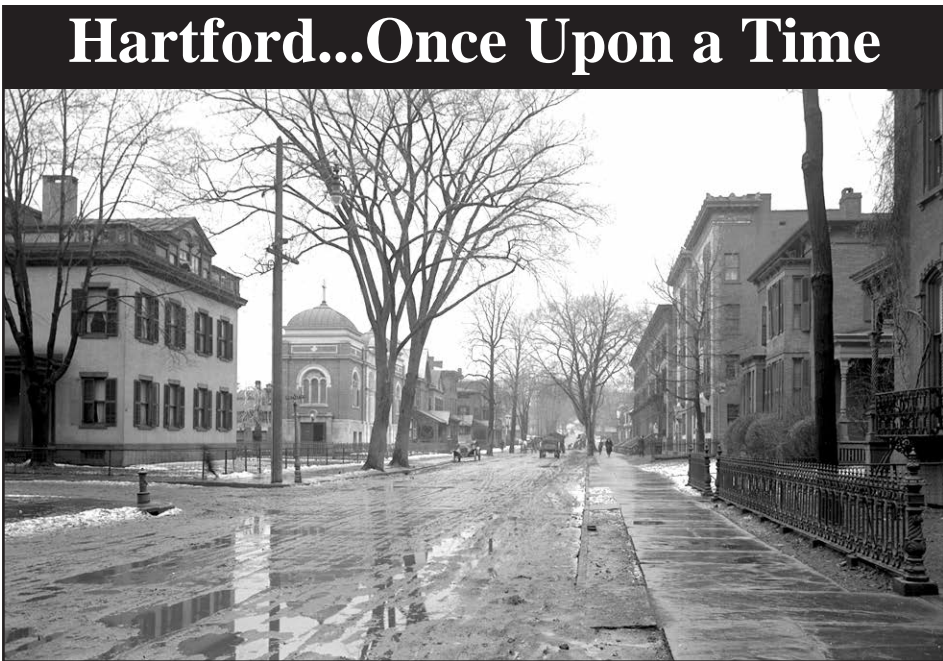
Since its inception, Google reports that

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New COVID-19 Testing Site at Xfinity Theatre

This week, Hartford’s 13th COVID-19 testing site opened at the Xfinity Theater, 61 Savitt Way, in Hartford’s North Meadows. The new free testing site’s hours are 8 am - 7:45 pm, Monday through Friday, and 12 - 5 pm on Saturday and Sunday. Xfinity Theatre owner and well known Connecticut concert-promoter Jim Koplik (center) is shown at a press conference Tuesday morning announcing the opening of the site, which is being operated by CIC-Health. To register for a test, go to: www.cic-health.com/test. Those who do not register will also be tested but may have longer wait times. U.S. Senator Chris Murphy (left) said increased testing is crucial to stopping the spread of the resurgent virus. As of Tuesday, according to the latest figures released by Governor Ned Lamont’s office, 1,149 are currently hospitalized in Connecticut with the COVID-19 virus, an increase of 38 since Monday. 24 new COVID-19 associated deaths were recorded Tuesday, bringing the state’s total to 6,192. Bronin said the new testing site is accessible to both Hartford residents and those from the surrounding towns since it is only about 1.5 miles from the junction of I-84 and I-91. “If you feel you need to be tested, please, get tested,” Bronin said. “You don’t need to be exhibiting any symptoms, you don’t need insurance, you don’t need a prescription. We’ll even provide transportation to the test site if you can’t get there on your own. There are no barriers standing in the way of you being tested.” (Hart photo)



The main clue to the location of this 1917 photo is the Whitman Court street sign at left center (That was easy, huh?). Whitman Court is a short street running between Buckingham Street and Capitol Avenue in Downtown Hartford. So is this Buckingham looking east, or Capitol Avenue looking west? Close examination reveals it’s the latter. At left center is Holy Trinity Church, which was founded to serve Hartford’s growing Lithuanian community and has since been greatly expanded. The two buildings in the distance at right are still standing on Capitol Avenue, near the intersection of Hudson Street. The buildings closest to the camera have been demolished. (Photo courtesy of the Hartford Public Library’s Hartford Collection)

NEWS BRIEFS

Food Distribution Resumes at Rentschler Field

Foodshare will resume emergency food distribution at Rentschler Field, 615 Silver Lane, East Hartford, every Tuesday starting January 12. Hours are 9:30 am - 1pm. Residents of Hartford and Tolland Counties are eligible for one package of food each week for their families. Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, Foodshare has distributed over six million meals in central Connecticut. To make a donation, go to Foodshare.org

Help for Residents Struggling to Pay Heating Bills

Operation Fuel is encouraging Connecticut residents who are struggling with utility and energy bills and unpaid balances to seek financial assistance through its new online portal at operationfuel.org/gethelp. Even before COVID-19’s devastating financial impact, the United Way found that more than 400,000 low- and moderate-income Connecticut families were at risk of not being able to pay their utility bills. Now, residents who have never needed emergency energy assistance before are desperately seeking help. Already this fiscal year, Operation Fuel has seen a 20% increase in requests for help with electric, gas, oil, water, and other energy costs. Since July, residents seeking assistance with their utility bills have been able to apply for help online at operationfuel.org/gethelp, a 24/7 web-based portal that provides a safer alternative to in-person appointments during the pandemic. The online system also offers easier access for people who have mobility issues, limited transportation, child or elder care responsibilities, or jobs during typical business hours. In addition to Operation Fuel, the Connecticut Energy Assistance Program (CEAP) provides help to offset the winter heating costs of Connecticut’s lower income households, specifically those households whose income falls at or below 60 percent of the state median income. To access energy assistance through CEAP you must make an appointment with the CEAP application site in your area. If you need help paying for your primary source of

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City Man Fatally Shot By Police

BY ANDY HART

A Hartford man was fatally shot on Gilman Street by Hartford Police on December 26. The incident is currently under investigation by Margaret E. Kelley, the State’s Attorney for the Ansonia-Milford Judicial District, with the State Police’s Eastern District Major Crimes Squad. Body-camera footage from three officers involved in the incident was released last week.

On the evening of December 26, Hartford Police were called to Gilman Street in the South End on a report of a man in the street armed with both a handgun and a rifle. According to police, arriving officers located the armed man, later identified as Shamar “Marmar” Ogman, after a foot chase and asked him several times to drop his weapons. Police say Ogman refused to comply and a stand-off ensued in the parking lot of 14-16 Gilman Street.

Police officers continued to shout for Ogman to drop his weapon, one saying, “Put it down. Nobody needs to get hurt.” On the body-camera footage, one officer says to another, “What are we doing with this? He’s pointing his gun a lot at us.”



On Wednesday, December 30, family and friends of Shamar Ogman gathered to honor his memory at the site of his fatal shooting by Hartford Police on December 26 on Gilman Street in the city’s South End. Donnilyn Williams is shown lighting a candle marked “#OgmanStrong.” (Hart photo)

Shortly afterward, according to body-camera footage from Officer Ashley Martinez, she shouts “He’s pointing it!” Martinez then fires a single shot.

Police say they then cautiously approach Ogman, took his rifle away and begin rendering aid. He was transported to Hartford Hospital but died the next day, December 27.

Following the release of the

body-camera footage on December 29, Mayor Luke Bronin said, “The videos released today show a very dangerous situation, with a heavily-armed man aiming a rifle at police officers in a residential neighborhood. Any loss of life in our community is painful, and our hearts go out to the family of Mr. Ogman. My thoughts are also with Officer

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Climate Change and the Hartford Community

BY TOM SWARR

How do you get people to think about climate change during a pandemic? That is what the Governor’s Council on Climate Change (GC3) is asking. Connecticut could be facing 20 inches of sea level rise and a 10-fold increase in coastal flooding by 2050. Average temperatures could increase by 5°F, resulting in an average of 25 days with above 90°F temperatures and 40 fewer days with frost. The GC3 has issued a draft report summarizing 61 recommendations from a dozen workgroups.

The very first recommendation listed is to develop and fund a community engagement strategy. Like the pandemic, climate change will disproportionately impact poor communities of color. Equity is a core element of the plan, requiring that all communities have meaningful opportunities to participate in the policy process—a challenge during the COVID restrictions. The report calls for a process that makes it “easy for communities to offer input, recognizing and respecting the other demands on people’s times and resources.” But in the middle of a pandemic how many Hartford residents will have the time and resources to wade through the nearly 800 pages of detailed reports from the working groups to understand the basis for the recommendations?

How do you explain the climate benefits of a pandemic that has pushed so many to a financial brink? Global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions were down by 7% last year. To avoid the worst-case climate scenarios, we will need to repeat that annual reduction each year going forward while rebuilding the economy. Fortunately, there are many actions that can reduce GHG emissions, correct environmental injustices, and create economic opportunities for disadvantaged communities. This can be as simple as planting trees. A healthy urban forest can mitigate heat island effects, save on air-conditioning, and even reduce crime and

boost property values. Many Hartford residents are unable to take advantage of the state’s energy efficiency programs because their homes contain lead paint, asbestos, or mold. Improving access to programs to remediate these health barriers and implement home energy improvements can yield significant savings in health costs, reduce energy bills, and provide local job opportunities. Expanding shared solar programs, especially on urban brownfields, roofs, and parking lots can make clean power more accessible to disadvantaged communities.

Not all recommended actions will be as easy to explain. Expanding the electric vehicle (EV) charging network is a necessary investment to encourage people to switch to EVs but will compete for funds with expanding transit services. EVs will help reduce traffic pollution, which provides a health benefit to urban communities. The competing objectives will need careful balance. Other choices are even more contentious. One recommendation urges we maintain the in-state “zero-carbon nuclear generation” and develop a long-term strategy to achieve zero-carbon electricity supply in Connecticut by 2040. Many would not agree nuclear is “zero- carbon” and those struggling to get through today may have little interest in the 2040 electricity supply.

It is clear that any community engagement on climate action will involve difficult choices and complex trade-offs between competing objectives. As a community, how do we have an open and respectful dialogue that enables the disadvantaged to have a meaningful role in “creating plans that affect their well- being, values, and community perspectives and viewpoints”? The GC3 report recommends community members have “mechanisms for monitoring policy planning and implementation and to offer questions and input.” Again, how

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Politically Speaking

A Fresh Look at Issues Facing our Region & State

BY MIKE MCGARRY

Remembering P.V. O’Donnell

At the end of this month, we will commemorate, in various ways, the 10th anniversary of the passing of Irish fiddler P.V. O’Donnell.

For over 20 years, P.V. played, taught and promoted traditional Irish music in the Greater Hartford area. And just like a pebble tossed into a pond, his efforts continue to ripple through the local Irish music scene and beyond.

We remember the first time we met P.V. Steve McKay, of Municipal Cafe fame, introduced him to us as “The Real McCoy” at a local church show. Soon, after teaming up with another great musical friend of ours, Peter Harvey, the three of us performed to widely diverse audiences, from senior centers to concert halls, as “Three Irish Lads Going Grey.”

The real stars, P.V. and Peter, could read any audience and soon they had lots of gigs. P.V., who had been a big star in Ireland with the group Barley Bree, soon attracted numerous playing partners and developed a full schedule of performing, teaching, putting out CDs and playing reunions with Barley Bree.

We had many adventures with P.V. over the years since our first fateful meeting. For example, P.V., Davey Muirhead and yours truly spent 10 days in Ireland in 1998 tracing the trail of the 1798 Irish Rebellion. It wasn’t long before kids in New Ross (Hartford’s Irish Sister City) would call out “Hey Fiddler” as we walked around town from pub to pub. P.V. played for the Irish Taoiseach (Gaelic for Prime Minister) at a political dinner, many sessions (seisiún) and, every night after closing, in the apartment we rented. It was a good thing the landlord was hard of hearing!

Another gig that didn’t turn out so well back here in the states was a massive Saint Patrick’s Day Show in

the old G Fox Building for four days in March in the mid-1990s. We had everything all set. A nice spot on the first floor, an expansive stage, donated spirits, great publicity and...an ice storm almost every night. But, somehow we survived. All the performers got paid and it’s a great memory.

However, out of all that came the best of all. Ron Page, the brewmaster of City Steam Brewery, was so impressed by the quality of the music – and the dedication of the players who kept turning up in the ice storms – that he convinced his restaurant/brewery to hire P.V. to put together a weekly Irish music seisiún (session). Oh, wasn’t that a time, every Wednesday night, week after week. Later, international stars like Tommy Peoples, Dan and Bonnie Milner from New York City, and players from Vermont, Massachusetts and beyond would join P.V. to play, drawn by his reputation and gentle manner. Younger players were also encouraged to sit in. After a long stint at City Steam, the session moved to McKinnon’s Pub on Asylum Street.

We’ll also never forget P.V.’s concerts at The Bushnell, the University of Saint Joseph, the Mark Twain Series, First Night Hartford, trips on the Erie Canal, house parties and long nights playing and chatting with the master and his guiding wife, Marion. She was his rock and kept him on the straight and narrow – not always an easy task, to say the least.

P.V., we hardly knew ya! Every day with him was an adventure and when you finally went to your eternal rest, 80 musicians gave you a fine musical farewell.

After that sad day 10 years ago, many friends, fellow players and students keep in touch with Marion and relish her visits from her home in Ireland.

CITY OF HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT NOTICE TO TAXPAYERS

The second semi-annual installment of taxes on the Grand List of October 1, 2019, were due and payable on January 1, 2021. Executive Order No. 9R extends this due date deadline to April 1, 2021. Eligible taxpayers, businesses, nonprofits, and residents are those that have previously attested to, or documented, significant economic impact by COVID-19 or that they previously attested to providing commensurate relief to those significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Failure to pay any tax due January 1, 2021, on or before April 1, 2021, will cause the tax to become delinquent and subject to interest from the original due date of January 1, 2021, at the rate of 1 ½ % per full or partial month. Any delinquent tax is subject to a minimum interest charge of two dollars (\$2.00).

Since failure to receive a bill does not invalidate the tax or, in the event of delinquency, respective penalties, taxpayers who do not receive a bill by the end of the first full week of January should request a duplicate from the Division of Assessment and Collections.

Payments may be mailed to the address on the bills. Payments may also be made online at www.hartfordct.gov/tax or in the drop box located outside the Office of the Tax Collector, 550 Main Street, Room 106, Hartford, Connecticut, Monday through Friday between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., and excluding holidays. Payments may also be made in person at the address above. Tax Office hours are subject to change during the current health emergency.

NANCY RAICH, CCMC
Tax Collector
City of Hartford

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Bulkeley Renovation Planning Process Begins

BY DONNA SWARR

I was invited to be the South Green NRZ representative on the Bulkeley High School Renovation Advisory Committee. The first meeting was held on Friday, December 18th via Zoom. There are well-defined advisory committee guidelines for the design phase of a construction project. The Advisory Committee will meet with the architect and program manager to provide input on program needs, school activities, and the use of the site and the facility. And later, we will be updated during construction about the project's progress. At the December meeting a tentative design was shared with us. It is a huge project. BHS has many schools and programs which run within the structure. The Board of Education moved into the building this past fall. There had been hope for a new field house but the cost was prohibitive. On the north side of the property there are two outbuildings that will be removed. A new structure will replace it at the corner of Wethersfield and Wawarme Avenues to provide a central commissary. The Regional School Choice Office will be housed on the east side of the lower level of the building, its entrance adjacent to the main entrance to the school, but will be completely enclosed in its own section. The layout of the rooms on each floor have been redesigned to allow for a separate 9th grade section, an afterschool educational support program, and a special education wing. There are many more



details. The design was approved by the BOE on Monday, December 14th. Newfield Construction has teamed with MCM Acoustics in providing construction management services for the Bulkeley High School renovation as a new project in Hartford CT. This project also includes a separate fit-out and relocation of Hartford Public Schools' Central Office.

To see the presentation, including the floor plans go to, <https://www.facebook.com/AccessTV.org/videos/3535405489827898>. The presentation starts at 6 minutes into the meeting and lasts about 20 minutes. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me via email at swards@comcast.net.

Christmas Tree Collection

Hartford Department of Public Works will begin picking up Christmas trees at curbside on your regular trash day, beginning Monday, January 4th thru Friday, February 5th. Christmas trees are not considered a bulky item. For further information, please call Hartford 311 at 860-757-9311. Staff Available Monday – Friday: 8:00am – 5:00pm.

Community Hope Garden Hearts Now Available, Reserve One Today



This past holiday season was very different for many Hartford families due to Covid-19. As you safely celebrate this holiday season, the City of Hartford wants to remind you of the wooden hearts available for those who have lost someone due to the pandemic, which you may place at any of the Community Hope Gardens throughout the city.

Visit www.hartfordct.gov/hope-gardens to reserve your heart today and view the locations that they can be placed in Spring 2021. Call Hartford 311 at 860-757-9311 for more details.



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News & Views



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ASYLUM HILL NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

From the
Executive Director
BY DAVID MACDONALD

Happy New Year from everyone at AHNA

AHNA wishes you and your family a happy and healthy New Year. Our first General neighborhood meeting of 2021 took place on Monday, January 4th at 6:15pm via Zoom. The agenda for January

last completed in 2009 so its due to be updated. It is a comprehensive plan that identifies priorities and goals in the areas of: Economic Development, Commercial Corridors, Green Spaces, Educational

The Hartford recently conducted a survey of Asylum Hill that identified the 3 top priorities of the neighborhood: employment/ jobs, housing/homelessness, and public safety.

included an overview of the upcoming legislative session from Speaker-elect Matt Ritter and as well as an update on road safety and school zone speed camera legislation in 2021.

The Asylum Hill Neighborhood Association's mission statement is that AHNA empowers and connects residents and stakeholders to improve the quality of life in Asylum Hill. One of the many ways we bring together residents and stakeholders is through our Neighborhood Strategic Planning process. It is a plan that will guide the future of Asylum Hill and it was

Opportunities, Historic Preservation, Recreation & Culture, Transportation, Public Safety, Housing, and Land Use & Zoning in Asylum Hill. We will begin 2021 with a review of these priorities and an updating of our Strategic Plan.

The Hartford recently conducted a survey of Asylum Hill that identified 3 top priorities of the neighborhood as employment/ jobs, housing/homelessness, and public safety. AHNA looks forward to partnering with the Hartford to incorporate these priorities into AHNA's update of our Neighborhood Strategic Plan, and identify poten-

tial improvements.

First, we will convene a Strategic Planning Steering Committee in January. They will then establish several Task Forces to focus on the priority areas. Task Forces will also bring forward collaborative solutions to our neighborhood challenges. If you are interested in participating, watch for emails about Task Forces in February to sign up. The Task Force meetings will be via zoom until further notice. AHNA Committees will also be asked to provide input into our plans, so you can participate through any committees you already are a member of.

As you can see, we will need your help to update our Strategic Plan. If you are interested in helping any of those goals to become reality, please sign up when you see the emails for Task Force participants. You will also be able to sign up for the Task Forces on our website. We need your help and input, so please join us in this effort.

All of us here at AHNA, as well as our partners, stakeholders and neighborhood residents look forward to launching our new year of activity for 2021 with a focus on updating our Strategic Plan and our efforts to revitalize Farmington Avenue in conjunction with the Farmington Avenue Alliance.

AHNA: The Year in Review

In looking back at the year that everyone seems to disparage, let's try to identify a few of the good things that happened, if only to give one another some encouragement for the year ahead.

In the face of this pandemic year that has been so difficult for so many businesses, especially small businesses, Asylum Hill has seen the addition of several new businesses and some new owners for existing businesses. 178 Ashley got a new owner late in 2019 and despite the pandemic, proceeded to remodel the interior to create Enax Market.

Shortly thereafter in June, Sybs Grille opened at 628 Asylum Ave in the Capitol View building. It has an interesting mix of menu items and is open from 10:00am to 8:00pm.

Several new businesses have begun in the shopping center at 294-308 Farmington Ave. The Laundromat, now called Super Spin has been newly renovated and is open until 9:00pm daily. The old 99¢ Store is the new One Stop Shop with both food and housewares, and finally at 308 Farmington is the A-1 Pizza shop that moved west to the old Little Caesars Pizza. And of course the icing on this cake was the mural on the east side of the building and the bright storefront paint that drew lots of attention to these new stores.

Meanwhile, homeownership moved forward, with the completion of 4 new NINA homes in 2020, 3 of which have new owners. Both the newly renovated 115 and 117 Sigourney St have new owners as well as 86 Hawthorn, which is new construction. However NINA is not the only developer helping to improve Asylum Hill's housing stock. 314-16 Sargeant St was purchased in 2017 by Macalun Lindo, and with the help of the Hartford Preservation Alliance in January of 2020 applied for Historic Tax Credits. Work there is progressing. 43 Niles, which had been derelict for years finally got a new owner in March as did 15 Marshall. Both are in the process of being brought back on line to provide quality historic living units.

While this is not an exhaustive list, it has to include the newest committee formed by AHNA, the Green Committee. Their mission is all things environmental and you will be hearing a lot from them in 2021.

Still, the most exciting event for 2020 was the neighborhood needs assessment that was conducted by The Hartford, and their commitment to invest \$10 million over the next 5 years based on the results of that survey. It is heartening to say the very least. 2021 is looking very promising indeed.

VOLUNTEER OF THE MONTH

Josie Reilly

For those of you who have been to the AHNA website most any-time in the past few years you have no doubt noticed that the basic design hasn't changed in a lot of years, and also that it's not the most modern or user friendly.

This began to change when our Executive Director, David MacDonald found a company on the web called Catchafire. Their purpose is to match nonprofits with skilled volunteers to help them both. David went on looking for help redesigning our website, and very quickly got several interested volunteers. After reviewing sample work and a short interview, we chose Josie.

Her background included a degree in Art history and painting, after which she started looking for work and did some website work at the University of Minnesota. This led her to UX design short for user experience. When COVID struck, Josie returned to Minnesota from

Sweden. She listed with Catchafire, and got connected to us. Her skills are exactly what we needed. She was able to see what we're trying to communicate, but as an outsider, also able to see what's missing or confusing, in short, how it looks to someone who's not us. We should have a new site for everyone to see very soon. We now need her designs to be translated into the website itself which will be hosted by Flipcause.

In talking to Josie for this column, I found someone who is just beginning to find her place in the world. She wants to go on to get a masters degree in UX, and is really passionate about helping nonprofits like AHNA succeed by being more efficient and user friendly. There don't seem to be many good things that have come from this pandemic, but this connection may be one. For more information on Catchafire, please go to <https://www.catchafire.org>

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Asylum Ave Mansions: Part 3

When we left off last month we noted that there are fewer than 100 single family, owner-occupied brick Victorian homes remaining in Asylum Hill. That is less than a quarter of the more than 400 such homes that are shown on the Sanborn map from 1920. Very few of them it would seem were even photographed or if they were, the photographs are no longer available.

As one tours Hartford’s neighborhoods, it becomes very clear, that this concentration of brick Victorian homes exists nowhere else, which is why they are so important to the fabric of Asylum Hill.

However it is the show homes, the “mansions” that draw the greatest attention, and none more so, than of course the Mark Twain Home and those of his neighbor Harriet Beecher Stowe and the Katherine Seymour Day home. As has been mentioned in various Then & Now columns, there were several Warner homes nearby on Forest St as well as Goodwin estates on Woodland that have not survived, and these are just a few of the really grand homes that once populated Asylum Hill.

But we can’t live in the past, so I’d like to turn your attention to a few of the other grand homes that have survived and what they are being used for.

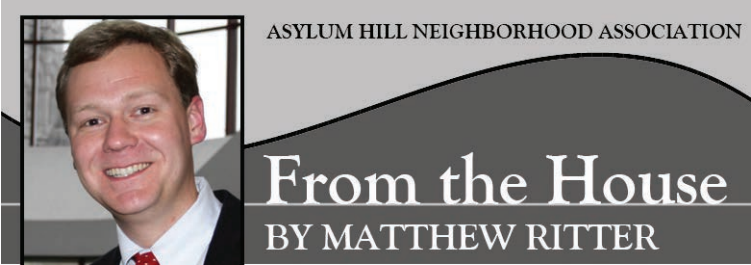
136-38 Collins St is a 2nd Empire style home built about 1870 and one of the largest after Twain and Stowe. It is owned by CIL Inc. and is leased to Community Solutions Inc. CSI provides re-entry services for people from the criminal justice system. Their main office is in Bloomfield, and of the 12 sites that they operate in Connecticut, 5 are in Hartford, 2 in Asylum Hill.



Another such home is of course 360 Farmington, the home of HartBeat Ensemble across the street from the Twain and Stowe homes. The property includes the Carriage House Theatre that was created from the original carriage house behind the home. The home is currently used for offices both for HartBeat and other tenants.

Other such repurposed mansions in the area include 49 Woodland, The Perkins-Clark home, now a part of the Wheeler Clinic campus and 66 Forest St, the Charles Boardman Smith home, both part of the original Nook Farm area. The Boardman Smith home was for a while the offices of the Antiquarian and Landmark Society, and has had several owners since then. It is currently owned by the estate of Okryun Marrero who purchased it in 2016.

Perhaps the most relevant example of a preserved mansion from this period is the home at 847 Asylum. We’ll look into that next month. Photos of these former mansions are available at <https://photos.app.goo.gl/fnWmAWc78ecktcnx7>



2021!

2021 is here and we are ready for a new year and a new legislative session. I am very proud that my colleagues in the House of Representatives have chosen me to be Speaker of the House after four years as House Majority Leader.

The new year marks the start of 2021 (Finally!), but January 1st also marks the enactment of new laws in our state...including legislation capping the monthly cost of insulin and other equipment necessary to manage diabetes. The law also permits pharmacists to prescribe a 30-day supply of diabetes-related drugs and devices to patients in certain emergency situations. Another new law is part of our response to the poor storm response by utilities this past summer.

State regulators will investigate, develop, and adopt a framework for implementing performance-based regulation of each electric distribution company (Eversource and United Illuminating). It also allows regulators to initiate a proceeding to investigate, develop, and adopt a framework to implement performance-based regulations for gas and water companies.

Utilities will be judged on safety, reliability, emergency response; affordability, customer satisfaction and equity. It’s a new way to look at our utilities.

I want to hear from you about the issues that matter most to you and your family. Please contact me if I can ever be of any assistance. I can be reached at Matthew.Ritter@cga.ct.gov, on Facebook @RepresentativeMattRitter or by phone at (860) 240-8489, if you have any questions or concerns.

Stay safe, stay well, and happy New Year.

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HPD Officer’s Lawsuit

Continued from page 1

over 6,250,000 hits have been generated by his website. He acknowledges that many of these are Hartford police officers, State police officers, and reporters and politicians who follow his reportage. Police authorities are powerless to order their subordinates not to read We the People Hartford or any other information source. The website has a clearly delineated section where Brookman writes his stories. They are all signed and he takes full responsibility for them, noting that his opinions are his, based on his investigative reporting and close review of police matters in other news sources, whether in print or on line, by attending HPD press briefings and news conferences, and through personal contact with police personnel from Chiefs on down.

As a blog, individual readers of the website can also post their comments in a separate section. They can elect to reveal their identity or use a pseudonym or just sign their comment “anonymous.” They write their comment directly on the blog and when they push the button, it goes to Google, not to Brookman’s hard drive. Upon receipt of a comment, Google Blogger forwards a notice to Brookman which he usually sees on his cellphone. He almost always tells Google Blogger to publish the comment by pushing a button that says “allow” and Google publishes the comment sans any identifying information. Google serves as a cut-off and its records, not Brookman’s, may have the information.

Google also advises it will provide information it has maintained, but only in response to a Court order directed at it. It is interesting to note that Google (and Brookman) are insulated by federal law against any claim for publishing any information, which the drafter of the allegedly libelous message, whether posted anonymously or not, has posted. This is the “230” amendment President Trump sought to have Congress adopt as a condition to presidential non-veto of the Military Appropriations bill two weeks ago. Congress declined to eliminate the protection 230 affords publishers and over-rode the veto.

In comments in answer to your Honor’s questions at this motion to Strike, the plaintiff’s Attorney Patrick Tomasiewicz, told the court that this action was not directed at Mr. Brookman. Rather, he said, it was an attempt to learn the identity of the anonymous commenters who they allege slandered or libeled Mr. Benvenuto. But they can’t get from Brookman what he doesn’t have. This is a complaint filed against Brookman.

It requests extraordinary right to rummage through his personal affairs in order to find a specific piece of information that is not in there. He is not the target of the underlying claim that may be filed against the anonymous commenter. He is also not in the possession of identifying information relative to the anonymous poster. But his cell phone and email both contain information about Brookman, personally as well as about friends and sources who have spoken to him confidentially. If the plaintiff is serious about trying to identify who the anonymous commenter is, he must pursue Google. But the identity of the anonymous commenters may not be plaintiff’s real objective.

In the last two weeks, there is ample evidence that plaintiff’s real motive is to support Chief Jason Thody and others in the command staff in their effort to –in their words– “Shut down Brookman and his blog”, Chief Thody threatened the Sergeants, Lieutenants, Captains, and Chiefs in attendance with a purge and chaos. He told them, according to multiple individuals in attendance, that in the next few weeks he would discover the names of all those who have talked to Brookman and will fire them all. That could be a hundred or more individuals out of a 440-officer force. Virtually none of them have said anything disparaging about Lieutenant Benvenuto or any other HPD officer. Some have actually posted their support for Thody and others or endorsed or opposed a Brookman opinion, none of which are the subject of plaintiff’s purported action. Brookman’s reportage is not the stuff of gossip. It is front page news in the Hartford Courant, TV Channels 30, 61, 3, articles in the Hartford News, the New York Times, New York Post, and many radio stations throughout Connecticut. In just the last few months, We the People broke stories on the COVID 19 outbreak at HPD and the concomitant failure of leadership to properly engage in the necessary protective steps to protect the force. (By the way, changes were instituted within hours of Brookman’s first report on his website.) Other stories included Chief Thody’s car crash and his efforts to cover it up, and the Dead Pool, reported nationally after it was broken by Brookman, the failure to secure the impound lot at HPD, and the theft of dozens of ATV’s and dirt bikes. Kevin Brookman may be a major thorn in the current HPD command structure. Maybe that’s why there are reports that Chief Thody is contributing to Benvenuto’s effort.

What makes this case unique is that the action purports to secure the name of an anonymous party from a reporter who does not have

the information. But the reporter does have many sources who have provided him with important information that concerns the HPD and the residents and visitors to Hartford. Without agreeing that current general orders prohibiting employees reading We the People or talking privately to a reporter or friend are Constitutionally legal, their violation of a condition of their employment is not the basis of a legally sufficient action in the Superior Court. The Chief has announced that he will soon have the information of all who have contacted–not posted comments–Brookman and that he intends to fire them. You may appeal the firing, he told his Supervisors, but it will be a year or more before the appeal is heard. What makes this even more egregious is that Thody, who clearly has formulated an opinion on the hearing’s outcome, will be the judge in the pre-arbitration phase of the matter.

Without Google, the stated intention of the Plaintiff, to secure the name(s) of commenters who allegedly libeled or slandered the Plaintiff is not achievable. But to allow the Plaintiff to rummage through a non-party’s cell phone and computer in search of names that are not there, given the acknowledged intention of the Chief to use this information to punish officers whether or not they slandered Benvenuto, would be a massive miscarriage of justice.

The second amended complaint references Hartford Police General Orders violations of which may be punishable under the department’s grievance process outlined in the Collective Bargaining Agreement between the City of Hartford and The Hartford Police Union. They do not allow for an individual employee to utilize a breach of these regulations in a private cause of action against another employee or a member of the general public. These regulations all purport to regulate activity between employees in the course of their employment. The exclusive method for bringing an employee up on charges related to General Orders is through the Collective Bargaining Agreement Grievance Process, and the Employee Rights contained in the bargaining agreement. No provision is made permitting one employee to institute a proceeding based on the General Orders outside of the enumerated processes in the Superior Court or anywhere else. One officer may proceed against another officer if the basis of the suit is found in the common or statutory law of the state of Connecticut.

The manner by which the command authority at HPD can enforce these rules against one of its employees are spelled out in the labor contract and city labor ordi-

nances. Nowhere is a private individual allowed to try to enforce a standard such as “...prohibits an officer from posting information regarding another officer without permission.” That is a clear violation of free speech since it does not limit itself to untrue information. Should the Superior Court be allowed to order the search of a non-party’s cell phone or computer based on that employment prohibition? Similarly, paragraph 7 prohibits posting true information if it were true but could be considered by the public “reckless or irresponsible.” Would paragraph 7 allow the Superior Court to pursue the identity of an employee punishing an officer for posting truthful information about a fellow officer using an illegal chokehold to snuff out the life of a subdued suspect? Should paragraph 8 allow the pursuit of the identity of an officer by the Superior Court for the publication of truthful information that may tend to discredit the police department? Can a matter be sustained by a private individual in the Superior Court who merely, as in paragraph 9, posted truthful information concerning matter relating to allegation of police misconduct?

I think not. The items complained of by Plaintiff relate to factual observations (“sleeping on the job”) to personal opinions about a fellow officer or a public official, that he is a racist. All of these are prohibited by the cited general orders. But they are not actionable offenses under our law. Probably, that is why Chief Thody opined that after he fires many officers, they may prevail on appeal.

None of these provisions, however, are the basis for a legally sufficient complaint by one individual against another nor can it be the basis for the instant compliant seeking discovery from a non-party in furtherance of a legally insufficient complaint. Defendant respectfully avers it must be stricken.

Climate Change

Continued from page 2

many Hartford residents have the time and resources to participate in such a process? There will need to be structured efforts to help mediate a meaningful process to connect the priorities and concerns of residents to various policy choices. Hartford has numerous non-profit organizations, NRZs, and the City’s Sustainability Office that can help. How do we best ensure Hartford residents have a meaningful voice in the policy process?

The current crisis is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reboot our economy to be more inclusive and less polluting. Will we choose wisely? Will we choose justly?

Fatal Police Shooting

Continued from page 2

Martinez. No officer ever wants to face a situation like this, and she acted to protect her fellow officers and the public when she felt that she had no other responsible choice.”

On Wednesday, December 30, about 30 of Ogman’s family members, friends and supporters gathered for a vigil in his honor at the site of his shooting on Gilman Street. The somber crowd placed candles marked “#OgmanStrong” next to the spot where he had been fatally shot.

Several speakers at the vigil said the police, city officials and the media had not told the complete story about Ogman. They described him as, “a hard worker, loyal, a good dude...and above all else, a great father.” Another said, “This is not Shamar’s fault. The system failed him. Although armed, he didn’t deserve to die.”

A man who had worked with Ogman at Amazon said he had once been stood up on a date and called Ogman from the restaurant to describe what had happened. Ogman drove to the restaurant to console his friend. He added, “The Shamar I knew was an amazingly kind, non judgemental person...I’m grateful I had him in my life.”

According to the *Hartford Courant*, Ogman was arrested twice in December prior to his death, once by Meriden Police on weapons charges on December 15 and another time by Bloomfield Police on December 23 for assault.

News Briefs

Continued from page 1

heat text CTWARM to 898211 to find a CEAP application site near you. For more information on utility assistance check out 211ct.org’s Utility Assistance Page at uwc.211ct.org/category/search/utility-assistance/.

New City Walking Group Forming



Hartford City Strollers, a virtual and socially distanced walking group, has been created to encourage physical activity among Hartford residents by the Hartford Rec Division and the Hartford Health Dept. In addition to walks, the group will meet via Zoom and socially distanced get togethers to share healthy recipes, trail suggestions, games, contests, and more. To join the group and find new locations for a nice walk, go to Facebook, or Instagram and search for "Hartford City Strollers."



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El Informativo Latino

¡Me Encanta la Música!

Mi nombre es Jasón Caraballo. Mis padres me cuentan que cuando era pequeño (2 años) ,en navidad no me atraian los juguetes. lo que me llamaba la atención eran las cajas donde venían los juguetes ,las colocaban en el piso y yo comenzaba a tocarlos como si fueran instrumentos. Un día fuimos a una actividad de la Iglesias, ya tenia 5 años ,le dije a mis padres que el músico que estaba tocando los timbales, no lo hacia bien .Mis padres me impidieron que yo dijera como hacerlo. En la escuela la maestra de musica vio el interes que tenia en la musica ,un día toque el piano sin saber lo que hacia, no se escuchaba bien ,pero ella observó mis manos ,le dijo a mi madre que yo tenia manos de pianista.Cuando tenia 12 (años) a mi un hermano de la congregación ,me regalo un libro de piano. Yo no sabía leer la lectura de piano, pero yo me enfoqué en practicar el piano, nunca me di por vencido . Un día de Navidad yo le toque a mis Padres , la canción de los 3 Reyes Magos, me salio bien. Mis padres estaban sorprendido y orgullosos con la cancion que les toque.

Yo puedo decir que no fui yo fue DIOS ATRAVE EL ESPIRITU SANTO QUE ME DIRIJIO A APRENDER. Cuando cumpli los 14 a 15 años mis padres me anotaron



Músico Jason Caraballo con Wilfredo Ayala de La Diferente Radio. (Foto por Andy Hart

con un buen maestro que su vida era adorar a JESUS CRISTO . Su nombre era JOSE ANGEL LOPEZ, el era un buen maestro profesional de musica. Yo con el empecé con las congas, después con el piano. Yo estaba con José Ángel Lopez por varios años , si no fuera ,DIOS PRIMERO Y POR JOSE ANGEL LOPEZ YO NO TUVIERA DONDE ESTOY.Me encanta la musica .Después de unos años, DIOS ME DADO UNAS NUEVA

ALABANZAS Y NUEVOS CANTICOS DE ADORACIÓN QUE LOS ESTOY GRABANDO EN MI NUEVO PROYECTO QUE SE TITULA ESPIRITU SANTO . Tu talento es el regalo de Dios para ti, Lo que haces con él es tu regalo de regreso a Dios. De parte de Hartford newspapers y La Diferente Radio te deseamos muchos éxitos y logros en tu vida.ORGULLO PUERTORRIQUEÑO. By Iris Rodríguez

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